

## THE BALTIMORE SUN

### Howard community leaders, officials rebuke Confederate flag at unity rally

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<http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/howard/ellicott-city/ph-ho-cf-flag-rally-0918-20140915,0,314572.story>

Howard County community leaders, school system officials and politicians gathered in front of the county government seat in Ellicott City Monday evening for a unity rally to protest recent displays of the Confederate flag.

"Every great community has a time it's tested, for without this test there can be no community testimony, no shared vision," County Council Chair Calvin Ball told the three dozen people assembled for the rally.

"While there have been incidences that have sought to potentially divide us, there are great people in every part of our county, and we choose not to be divided but to be united, and use this... as an opportunity where we can come together and make sure that everyone, in every part of our community, feels safe, feels included and feels valued," he said.

Discussion about the Confederate flag began after a Sept. 5 football game between Glenelg and River Hill high schools -- at River Hill -- when the flag was unfurled by a Glenelg student, who was asked to put it away. The school system said the student was disciplined, although it would not provide details.

Then, on Sept. 10, two Glenelg High School students came to school with Confederate flags draped around around their necks. The school system said the students were told to put the flags away before school started, according to a spokeswoman, who would not say if the students were disciplined.

The Rev. Robert Turner, a pastor at St. John Baptist Church in Columbia and the second vice president of the African American Community Roundtable, the group that coordinated the rally, addressed an argument shared by some since the initial incident that the Confederate flag is a southern symbol and does not necessarily have racial overtones.

"The Confederate flag may mean different things to different people in our country and in our community, but to African Americans in Howard County and African Americans in this country, the Confederate flag represents a key part of our history. It represents racism," Turner said. "We've come together to say that we don't share those values here in Howard County."

Howard County schools Superintendent **Renee Foose** said the school system would focus on creating a safe learning environment for students and teachers alike.

"We're enriched by our diversity, and we are committed to ensuring that everything we do keeps our children safe and on the right track for success," Foose said.

At the rally Ball said both incidents provided an opportunity for a "teachable moment.

"This is the beginning of a community conversation; a conversation that involves all of us, in every aspect of the county, every aspect of our diverse fabric, whether it's race, it's age, it's religion, it's ethnicity, to ensure that we move forward together, united," he said.